

Quan en dèiem xampany

When We Called It Champagne



UK panel's choice Year 2014

Author: [Rafel Nadal](#) [1]

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The author reconstructs the life of his great grandfather, Francisco Oller, who, at the age of sixteen, decided to leave Cassà and travel to France in search of a better life. And he found it. This book offers the story of an upright man, tenacious and hard-working, who ends up founding a grand empire in the world of French vineyards and champagne, far from his home. The novel carries the reader from Cassà de la Selva to Rheims y La Fosca. Written in evocative prose, the text presents a family history stretching from the end of the 19th century to the present day, passing through the First World War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

UK panellists opinion:

According to the panel, the subject of "Quan e dèiem xampany", a high society saga beginning at the end of the 19th century, has great potential and could travel well to the UK market.

The novel opens in the recent past, with a family celebration indicating the importance of champagne to the author-narrator: Francisco Oller – Bouchons à Champagne, the business created by the author's great-grandfather, is one of the most prestigious producers of champagne corks, with factories in Cassà in Catalonia, and Reims in France. In 2004, the French branch of the family attempts a hostile take-over of the Catalan factory, and this serves as the point of departure for exploring the life of the grandfather, a founder of a business empire, from the point he leaves a Catalonia ravaged by phylloxera in search of work in France, to the legacy beyond his death, focussing throughout on the obstacles placed in his way by 20th century history (World War One and Two, the Spanish Civil War, depressions, and more) and the (mostly) dysfunctional family relationships that he attempts to control (...)

(...) the plotline is not predictable, since although we know the events that provide the backdrop, we are intrigued by how the characters will respond to them. There are touching descriptions of individual human tragedy in the First World War (pp. 69-70), and we feel the grandfather's despair when war forces him from France again in 1940 (...)

Throughout the text the dialogue is excellent. (...) The dialogue here, though, is rich, sensitive, and most of all, believable, with oral forms that are appropriate to the different times, situations and characters. There are also elements of humour (...) there are wonderful portraits of early 20th-century high society(...) Most of all, the focus of the text – human emotion and tragedy, and understanding where we have come from – is a theme that should connect not only with British readers, but with all readers. (from the reader report by [Richard Mansell](#) [3])

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